

UNDER DEVELOPMENT

Game for a laugh?

You'd think installing a game would be easy for a software developer, but even experienced users can struggle with such a simple task, as David Robinson found

Well, the SuperBikes Riding Challenge game installed without a hitch on my new AMD Athlon 64 3800+ PC (see *Under Development*, *Shopper* April and May 2007). The readme file says it will, if necessary, update any DirectX files to the correct versions. There were no status messages saying it had done so, nor any whingeing about not being able to do so. So I clicked on the desktop short cut for the startup menu, clicked the Play the Game icon... and instead of the introductory sequence I got a message saying there was a file missing, and the program halted.

I had deliberately opted for all the default settings offered by the setup program, ignoring, for instance, the option to install the game in a different location (such as the drive D: partition, which has much more space). I found nothing that helped in the manual or on the packaging. The manual has nothing resembling a troubleshooting section but devotes two pages to crediting all the people who worked on the game, including the information that the PR manager was one Livio Cantagallo. I'm just Livid Cantmakeitgo.

REACHING A MILESTONE

The credits also list www.milestone.it so I tried looking there and, unsurprisingly, found a site all in Italian. However, there was a tiny little Union Flag icon which, when pressed, gives you the site in English. Which you find has no help, troubleshooting or links to anything offering support.

When I tried to run the program again I didn't even get the 'can't find file' message and got the generic Windows 'I've got a problem' General Protection Fault (GPF) message. The menu has a readme option that gives you a list of things to check "to save the cost of a call to the customer support service" – well, saving that cost is easy because nowhere do they give you a number to ring. However, it does confirm that the install procedure is supposed to sort out the DirectX files and settings for itself.



The Settings option on the menu said my video adaptor "doesn't support some options" and "may experience some problems during the game", then promptly went to GPF when I closed the message. It would have been nice to get to somewhere "during the game". The video hardware on my ECS 6100SM-M motherboard is a GeForce 6100 graphics chip which, according to Nvidia, delivers "top-notch compatibility and performance for all DirectX 9 applications". I realise it's not an absolutely top-of-the-range, state-of-the-art setup, but I had expected a bit more than this.

The www.blackbeangames.com site was similarly unhelpful. My hopes were raised by a glimpse of an online link that said "support". This, however, brought up a screen with support for French, Italian and German people, saying "Only for French market" and so on.

QUESTION MARK

It looks as if the SuperBike game is spectacularly picky about what hardware and software configuration it needs to run. Will it run under 64-bit XP? I don't know. Moreover, I don't know how to find out. It also raises interesting questions, such as: how do you find out what version of DirectX is installed on your PC? Typing 'DirectX version' into Windows XP's help isn't any use. You get two results: one that says Glossary and

tells you what DirectX does, and one link to Troubleshooting Network and Dial Up Connections.

If you're less specific and enter simply DirectX, you'll see two more relevant entries: Troubleshooting DirectX and Testing DirectX components. It transpires that there's a utility called dxdiag that you execute from the Run option on the Windows XP menu. Hopefully this will reveal all.

By the time I got round to doing this I was in the office, but that shouldn't have presented a problem because I could access the AMD PC, which was at home, using a virtual private network (VPN) connection. I don't have a fixed IP address at home, but usually the VPN works out the dynamic address and it doesn't change in the 10 minutes it takes to get to work (which it usually doesn't). Once there, I adjust the VPN target address if necessary then, once that's open, the ISP won't change the IP address again until I close the connection. Then I can keep the VPN open all day and sign in with Remote Desktop (from Start, Programs, Accessories, Communications, Remote Desktop Connection) whenever I want. To find out your current broadband IP address, go to www.whatismyip.com.

X MARKS THE SPOT

I digress. Signing on to the AMD machine remotely, I ran dxdiag and clicked on the Display tab. It told

me that the DirectX version was unknown, and that the DirectX features for graphics acceleration are "not available". What kind of Mickey Mouse graphics card is built into this motherboard? My three-year-old Sony Vaio does better.

I decided to dig a little deeper. There's a free utility called Sandra (which stands for System ANALyser, Diagnostic and Reporting Assistant) that you can download from SiSoftware (www.sisoftware.com) and is also in the Expert Toolkit section of the *Shopper* DVD. Sandra will tell you everything you want to know about your computer and what's installed on it. Under DirectX, General Capabilities, Sandra said my graphics hardware was capable of, well, nothing. All the features had a big red cross against them, which was a disappointment and a source of puzzlement, too. I ran Sandra on the Vaio notebook and most of the boxes were ticked. Weird. Maybe I've made a big mistake and I'm blaming Milestone/Blackbean unfairly by running the game on a vastly inadequate graphics setup.

When I got home I ran Sandra once more, and this time she ticked all the boxes with a big green tick, telling me the graphics 'card' has all the advanced features you can name. How odd. I think the answer is that there are some diagnostics relating to display properties that simply lie to you if you run them remotely, with both Sandra and Microsoft's dxdiag reporting only on the features that work across a Remote Desktop link. Which, obviously, isn't many. Sandra also confirmed that DirectX is the required version 9.

Reinstalling the game yet again didn't help, so I'm stumped. The error message is useless since it doesn't tell you which file is missing and I can't find any way to get help, advice or support. So I've wasted a whole £20. I'm giving up games for good. Until the next time. **CS**

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